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ABSTRACT

Separate sections of this document deal with refugee concerns in terms of a global approach, definitions of a refugee, alternatives for refugees, the international response, and long-term prospects. The booklet states that the present number of 16 million refugees is bound to increase given increasing rivalry over land and resources. The global community must improve its ability to anticipate conflicts that have a high potential for generating refugees. In the international community, however, the definition of the term refugee is constantly evolving. It now extends beyond the persecuted individual to whole groups of people fleeing from dangerous circumstances. According to the United Nations High Commissioner, the task of the international community is to see that those who become refugees cease to be refugees within a reasonable amount of time. The three routes to this end are voluntary repatriation, settlement in the country of first asylum, or resettlement in a third country. International support takes the form of United Nations support, bilateral aid, and private, voluntary organizations. In the long term, a new consensus among nations must be made explicitly: that a government has an obligation to protect the interests of all its citizens. If not, it sacrifices its claim to sovereignty over them. Legally establishing a fundamental right of asylum and ensuring that neutral relief operations have guaranteed access to refugees are high priorities for the United Nations. (Author/KC)

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Refugees: The New International Politics of Displacement

Kathleen Newland

SP 013 203

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Introduction

The saga of Indochina's "boat people" is the most dramatic, though not the most massive, refugee crisis of recent years. It, more than any other situation, has served to focus the eyes of the world on the plight of modern-day refugees. As 1979 came to an end with nearly 300,000 "boat people" still in refugee camps scattered around the perimeter of the South China Sea, many observers dubbed it "the year of the refugee." Few imagined that 1980 would equally merit the title, with an outpouring of refugees to match the previous year's, or that 1981 would open with the grim promise of yet another season of displacement.

There are currently about 16 million refugees adrift in the stormy seas of world politics.[1] No one predicts a quick reduction in their numbers, and it is easy to pinpoint several troubled regions capable of producing additional thousands at the drop of a hat—or the squeeze of a trigger. The scale, the complexity, and the persistence of the problem call for an almost unprecedented degree of cooperation among nations.

A fundamental change of approach to the problem of refugees may also be required. Refugee crises have been treated as aberrations in world politics: self-contained, sporadic, unpredictable upheavals bearing no relation to each other. They are treated in much the same manner as natural disasters. Yet it is becoming discouragingly clear that the presence of refugees is in fact characteristic of violent confrontation today. Because the world has become more densely populated—with half again as many people today as there were in 1960—the odds are higher that large numbers of people will be caught

in the cross fire wherever shooting starts. Rivalry over land and resources has intensified, spurred by the need to satisfy the requirements and aspirations of growing populations. And poverty holds more people than ever in its grip, providing a fertile breeding ground for tensions that can erupt into violence between or within countries. Even the search for solutions to these basic problems can lead to refugee-producing conflict, as ideological disputes over development strategies degenerate into shooting matches. In El Salvador, for example, the government is opposed by both the left and the right on the thorny subject of land reform. In most armed disputes in today's world the line between the military and political aspects of the contest has blurred, placing noncombatants in the front lines. Control over civilian populations is a tactic as well as an objective of modern warfare.

The ancient themes of human greed, betrayal of popular will, lust for power, ethnic hatred, and so forth combine with economic strains that have more recently emerged to ensure that the eighties will be a "decade of refugees" unless great foresight and cooperation are brought to bear. No nation is entirely immune to the effects of today's millions of displaced people. Some leaders may be unmoved by humanitarian considerations, but even they can hardly be indifferent to the continuing potential for instability that the homeless represent. A handful of national leaders believe that they can benefit from such instability. It is the responsibility of the whole community of nations to convince these few how dangerous and futile such a notion is in a crowded, complex, and highly interdependent age.

There is really no such thing as preventive action specific to refugee problems. Prevention lies in the larger realm of maintaining global stability, peacefully resolving disputes, recognizing human rights, and ameliorating the economic preconditions of violence—all, obviously, long-term propositions. In the meantime, however, the global community can do much to oil the wheels of humanitarian relief mechanisms. It can also work to improve its ability to anticipate conflicts that have a high potential for generating refugees, and thereby be better prepared to meet needs for both relief and mediation.

"The fundamental right that refugee status gives people is the right not to be sent back against their will."

Who is a Refugee?

Coping with refugees is made doubly complicated by the difficulty of defining the term. Who is a refugee? There is no comprehensive international document that establishes a definition recognized by all countries. The closest thing is the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, as amended by the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. The Convention and Protocol define a refugee as a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."[2] Also included were stateless people who would not or could not remain in the places where they had been living—citizens, for example, of countries that had ceased to exist in the aftermath of World Wars I or II.

The technical and sometimes tiresome question of who is and who is not a refugee has enormous significance for the displaced people themselves. The answer determines the degree of support and protection the individuals receive as well as the long-term resolution of their plight. The fundamental right that refugee status gives people is the right not to be sent back against their will to the country from which they have fled: the right, in legal parlance, of "non-refoulement." Nations that ratify the U.N. Convention and Protocol obligate themselves not to expel refugees from their territory without due process of law, and, if grounds for expulsion are found, to give the refugee time to seek legal admission to another country of asylum. The obligations of the host country also include issuing identity papers and travel documents, allowing refugees at least the same civil rights as those enjoyed by other legal immigrants, and facilitating as far as possible the refugees' assimilation and naturalization.

Those governing the countries that people flee from often dispute the validity of refugees' claims, calling them bandits, guerrilla fighters,

or simply illegal but voluntary migrants. The current regimes in Afghanistan, Kampuchea (formerly Cambodia), and Vietnam have used these arguments as defense against charges of violating their own citizens' basic human rights.

Countries on the receiving end of refugee flows have also been known to dispute claims of refugee status, sometimes out of apprehension over the heavy obligations a nation must bear when large numbers of homeless people descend. Thailand, for example, did not accord refugee status to most of the Kampucheans who fled across its border in 1979. The Kampucheans were, therefore, unprotected by international law, which would have shielded them from involuntary repatriation. Indeed, in June of 1979, Thailand—inundated with starving people and fearful of its own border security—forced more than 40,000 Kampucheans back across the border. Many of them died or were killed in the fighting between the forces of Heng Samrin and Pol Pot. After great international outcry over this episode, Thailand subsequently declared on open-door policy to all Kampucheans seeking asylum. But it still did not offically recognize them as refugees.[3]

The U.N. Convention of 1951 was formulated in the specific context of postwar Europe, when millions of displaced people affected by boundary shifts and changes of government existed in a legal limbo. The Convention sought to define the rights of these individuals, as well as the obligations of states that found themselves host to refugees for whom return to their own countries was likely to constitute at least a prison sentence—if not a death warrant. The task was conceived as a one-time obligation; in fact, the Convention as written applied only to victims of "events occurring before 1 January 1951," and nations were given the option of applying its provisions only to Europe. Once the refugees of World War II were taken care of, it was thought, the job would be finished.

The limits of time and geography incorporated in the 1951 Convention proved with time to be serious constraints on the world's ability

to deal collectively with refugee problems. New situations kept arising that generated additional refugees—such as Algeria's war for independence from France and the breaking in 1954 of that colonial tie, and the 1956 uprising in Hungary. Since World War II, the vast majority of refugees have originated in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. (See Table 1, pages 10-11.) The 1967 Protocol extended the scope of the Convention by eliminating the provision that only victims of pre-1951 events were covered and by removing the geographic limitation, except where ratifiers of the Convention specifically chose to retain it.

The Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees remain the most comprehensive legal instruments that deal with refugees, but their coverage is far from complete. Several factors limit them. Most important, they are only binding on governments that ratify them. So far, out of more than 150 countries in the world, only 78 have ratified one or the other.[4] Second, the U.N. instruments were designed with the individual refugee in mind, the man or woman with solid reason to believe that his or her government is determined to violate that person's basic human rights because of some particular characteristic of the individual. But many displaced people have less sharply defined, though still well-founded, fears. The simple, realistic fear of being in the way of opposing fighters is one powerful reason to flee, for example, though it has nothing to do with individual traits. Third, the Convention and Protocol apply only to people who are outside the boundaries of their own nation. Internally displaced people cannot be helped by them. And finally, international protection and support for refugees ceases as soon as they return home or acquire new nationalities, or as soon as the crisis that caused them to flee is resolved. The material needs of the displaced may continue, however, for some time after they technically cease to be refugees.

The limited scope of the Convention and Protocol has, in practice, been overcome by several means. Many countries abide by the general terms of these international agreements even though they have not actually signed the documents. Much of international law is

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Table 1: Major Sources and Locations of Refugees, 1980

Country of Origin	Refugees	Main Countries of Asylum
	(number)	
Africa		
Angola	178,000	Zaire, Zambia
Burundi	154,500	Tanzania
Chad	100,000	Cameroon
Equatorial Guinea	115,000	Gabon, Cameroon
Ethiopia	1,954,000	Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti
Namibia	36,000	Angola
Rwanda	175,000	Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zaire
Uganda	105,000	Sudan, United Kingdom, Zaire
Western Sahara	50,000	Algeria
Zaire	69,000	Uganda, Angola
Asia		
Afghanistan	1,700,000	Pakistan, Iran
Indochina (Kampuchea, Laos, Vietnam)	983,000	United States, People's Republic of China, Canada, Australia, France*
Pakistan	55,000	Bangladesh
People's Republic of China	183,500	Hong Kong, Macao, United States
Philippines	90,000	Malaysia
Tibet	78,000	India, Nepal, Bhutan, Switzerland
Europe		
Bulgaria	60,000	Turkey
Hungary	27,000	United Kingdom
USSR	66,000	United States, Israel

uncodified, and the terms of the U.N. instruments have entered into that body of customary law. They therefore have a moral force that goes beyond the binding commitments of the ratifying nations.

Table 1, continued

Latin America		
Argentina	266,000	Italy, Spain, Brazil
Chile	76,000	Venezuela, Argentina
Cuba	120,000	United States
El Salvador	20,000	Honduras
Haiti	41,000	Dominican Republic, United States**
Middle East		
Iraq	30,000	Iran
Palestine	1,757,000	Jordan, Gaza Strip, West Bank, Lebanon, Syria
Internally Displaced		
Cyprus	193,000	
Ethiopia	850,000	
East Timor	200,000	
Kampuchea	4,000,000	
Laos	1,000,000	
Lebanon	1,000,000	

*Countries of permanent resettlement.
**The total number of Haitians in these countries is much larger; this figure is the U.S. Committee on Refugees' estimate of the number of political refugees among Haitian migrants.
Source: U.S. Committee for Refugees, *1980 World Refugee Survey*, and author's estimates based on recent news reports.

The definition of a refugee now extends beyond the persecuted individual to whole groups of people fleeing from dangerous circumstances. An important instrument in accomplishing this was the Organization of African Unity's Convention on Refugees, adopted by the OAU in 1969. The OAU agreement incorporated the earlier definition of a refugee and added to it "every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seri-

ously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality." Only 18 countries have ratified the OAU Convention, but its expanded definition has attained considerable force in custom and practice.[5]

Along with recognizing groups of refugees, the United Nations has authorized its executor in refugee affairs, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, to assist people who are displaced within their own country's borders. And UNHCR may continue helping repatriated refugees until they can reconstruct their livelihoods at home. All these measures together have helped develop international mechanisms to respond to the needs of today's displaced people.[6]

The United Nations and OAU definitions of refugees are, necessarily, legalistic ones. They classify as refugees those who live unprotected by the laws of a nation and who therefore have no recourse if their rights are violated. People who leave their homeland without any right to enter another inhabit a legal no-man's-land. There is no one to issue passports if they need to travel, no agency to give them work permits, no courts to hear their grievances, and so forth—except to the extent that governments other than their own, operating according to internationally established standards, agree to protect the refugees' interests.

Neither the UN nor any of its member nations accord refugee status to people who flee from intolerable economic conditions, unless those conditions are a direct product of war. In fact, the statute of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees specifically states that "reasons of a purely economic character may not be invoked" in claiming refugee status.[7] Gauging the motives of an asylum-seeker is a delicate business and has been the basis of many disputes over the legal status of would-be refugees. A protracted lawsuit against the U.S. Government on behalf of Haitians who came to the United States without official sanction illustrates the argument over definitions at its most difficult.

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The Haitians, most of whom arrived by sea in dangerous boats, claimed political asylum but were said by the U.S. Government to be economically motivated migrants. International convention, of course, acknowledges a moral obligation to admit bona fide refugees for asylum until repatriation or resettlement can be arranged. Denial of entry to a migrant, however, is a legitimate expression of national sovereignty.

The Haitian case was argued with particular vehemence because it coincided with the acceptance in the US of nearly 120,000 Cuban émigrés, only a minority of whom met the conventional requirements for political asylum. The case was settled with a compromise that allowed both Cubans and Haitians to remain in the country but denied them refugee status. Both groups were ambiguously classified as "entrants" and received less federal assistance for resettlement than refugees would have been given. But their chief goal, and the basic right they would have had as refugees, was achieved: they avoided being deported to the country from which they had fled.[8]

The distinction between political and economic refugees often is hazy, especially when the government of a particular country views those who attempt to leave it as potential troublemakers or even traitors. In the Soviet Union and Cuba, for example, people who apply for exit visas often suffer harassment from the authorities. By the very act of attempting to emigrate, perhaps for economic reasons, people may make themselves politically suspect and therefore subject to persecution.

The international community is held back from a generous response to the plight of economic refugees by the sheer scale of the problem. The roughly 16 million political refugees seem to strain resources and goodwill to the breaking point. Yet there are many more would-be "economic refugees." Already, an estimated 20 million people have left their homes to seek work in other countries. The pool of possible migrants is vast: more than 350 million people worldwide are unemployed or severely underemployed.[9] This reservoir of

14 deprivation and frustration carries an explosive potential that could turn millions more into political refugees.

In the rather imprecise universe of international law and custom, the definition of a refugee is constantly evolving. Every conflict that uproots people is the product of a unique set of political, economic, geographical, and social circumstances. The framework that allows the international community to deal with the displaced in a coherent way must be constantly stretched to fit particular cases. There are, however, common threads that run through many refugee crises. Understanding them can make the definitional problems easier, and may even point the way toward more lasting solutions to the plight of all refugees.

Alternatives for Refugees

The task that the international community has taken on in concerning itself with refugees is, as the Deputy U.N. High Commissioner put it, "to see that those who become refugees cease to be refugees within a reasonable time."[10] There are three basic routes to this end: voluntary repatriation, settlement in the country of first asylum, or resettlement in a third country. The first of these, in which refugees return home of their own free will, is ideal both for the refugees themselves and for the countries and institutions that work with them. Logistically and psychologically it is the easiest solution, but politically it may be the most difficult. It requires, as a starting point, that the problem that drove people from their homeland be resolved. Material support for the returnees may also needed, at least until they can reestablish their livelihoods.

Despite the difficulties, there have been many successful cases of voluntary repatriation during the past decade. The most massive case involved the return of more than 10 million Bengalis to the new nation of Bangladesh in 1972. These refugees fled to India during

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the war of independence and subsequent Indo-Pakistani war. Caring for them during their exile was a monumental humanitarian task, involving almost all the U.N. agencies and private voluntary organizations concerned with refugees, as well as bilateral assistance from many countries. Between March 1971 and March 1972, more than $430 million was spent on the refugees, of which over half was provided by the Indian Government.[11]

When the war ended in December 1971, after the intervention of the Indian army, authorities of the Indian and Bangladesh Governments and of the UNHCR began to organize the refugees' return. In January 1972, more than 200,000 people crossed the Bangladesh border every day. In less than four months, the ten million had gone home and the refugee camps were closed. As UNHCR officials later noted, the experience held "useful lessons for the years—and the crises—to come."[12]

These lessons were put to good use throughout the seventies with smaller scale repatriation efforts in Angola, Burma, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique, and more recently in Nicaragua and Zimbabwe. With the defeat of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, most of the 200,000 people who fled to neighboring countries returned. The negotiated settlement of hostilities in Zimbabwe made possible the return to their homes of over a million people who either had been displaced within Zimbabwe or had left the country during the years of fighting. As of mid-1980 about 120,000 had returned from nearby nations, half of them with international assistance. The UNHCR established a $22 million program to help with the repatriation.[13]

Permanent settlement outside the home country is regarded as a poor second to voluntary repatriation, but in many cases it is the only practical alternative. Some refugees flee with no expectation of returning, such as the "boat people" from Vietnam or Jewish émigrés from the Soviet Union. Others leave thinking that they will return to their homes, but slowly establish livelihoods and roots in the countries of asylum. The ease and speed of resettlement is greatly affected by location. Many refugees make permanent homes in the first place

they reach: often a neighboring country where climate, culture, and perhaps even ethnicity are similar to the refugees' place of origin. Many of the Afghan refugees encamped in the northwest province of Pakistan are ethnic Pathans, as are the province's natives, for example, and almost all of Somalia's refugees from Ethiopia are ethnic Somalis.[14]

Settlement in the country of first asylum often involves delicate political, social, and economic questions. In a racially heterogeneous society, for example, an influx of refugees may upset a delicate balance among groups—a fear that in 1979 prompted Malaysian authorities to refuse for a time to give even temporary asylum to ethnic Chinese fleeing Vietnam. Often, countries of first asylum face a huge struggle to meet the basic needs of their own citizens, so that supporting additional displaced people represents an awesome burden. Somalia, one of the poorest countries in the world, hosts about 1.5 million refugees, 90 percent of whom are women and children. Approximately one of every three residents of Somalia is a refugee.[15]

The presence of refugees raises what may already be a high level of tension between neighboring countries. Fighters often mingle among refugee populations, using the camps for rest and medical treatment, and sometimes for recruitment. Vietnamese and Kampuchean troops of the Heng Samrin Government have crossed the Thai border several times to attack alleged guerrilla strongholds among the refugee camps.[16] And the more than one million Afghan refugees in Pakistan are suspected by the current regime in Kabul of being mere camouflage for guerrilla attacks against its rule. Pakistan cannot help but feel vulnerable to the kind of attacks from Afghanistan that were regularly visited on Mozambique, a country of asylum for both refugees and freedom fighters, by white-ruled Zimbabwe before the 1980 settlement there.

The welcome that a country of first asylum extends to refugees depends on a complex set of considerations: the strength or fragility of the receiving country's economy, the compatibility of the refugees with the local population, the speed and generosity of the interna-

tional community's response to the need for humanitarian assistance, the political stability of the host government, and the foreign policy stance of that government toward the conflict that produced the refugees. The last of these can be crucial, for it can determine whether refugees from a particular country are looked upon as allies or enemies, victims or pawns. The government of Somalia, for example, has welcomed the Somali refugees from Ethiopia with open arms, and not just because of ethnic ties. Somalia has long laid claim to the Ogaden region from which the refugees come.[17] If the Ogaden Somalis eventually win their fight for self-determination, it is very likely that they would choose to merge with Somalia.

By contrast, the governments of Southeast Asian countries have accepted refugees from Kampuchea, Laos, and Vietnam for temporary asylum with nervous reluctance. The leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and other countries in the region have discharged huge responsibilities toward hundreds of thousands of refugees, but are sure that they have nothing to gain from the situation and have no inherent responsibility for it. Indeed, they greatly fear its destabilizing effect on the entire area. Singapore's representative at a foreign ministers' meeting in 1979 described Vietnam's policy of forced explusion as "organized arson, intended to ignite the whole region."[18] The refugees, unwitting agents of this policy, have found a cool reception from neighboring countries.

Cultural expectations may also play a part in attitudes toward refugees. President Nyerere of Tanzania called upon the African tradition of hospitality at a regional conference on refugee problems in 1979 when he pointed out that "the refugees of Africa are primarily an African problem, and an African responsibility."[19] Tanzania, like some other African nations, has set aside land for the permanent settlement of refugees who have come from neighboring states.

For many refugees, neither repatriation nor settlement in the first country they reach is a possibility. The costly and time-consuming process of relocating in a third country then becomes necessary. The largest and most dramatic instance of third-country resettlement

in the past decade is the ongoing case of the Indochinese "boat people" and their counterparts who have fled Kampuchea, Laos, and Vietnam by land. More than 1.5 million people have left their homes since 1975. Approximately 130,000 went directly to the United States during the first year, and about 266,000 Vietnamese of Chinese origin found first and permanent asylum in the People's Republic of China in the late seventies. More than 680,000 Indochinese have been relocated indirectly, stopping first in other countries of the region to await resettlement. Of these, two-thirds eventually settled in the United States. The governments next most generous with offers of resettlement have been France, Canada, and Australia.[20] (See Table 2.)

The drama of the spring and summer of 1979, when nearly 60,000 Indochinese refugees arrived each month in countries of first asylum, has calmed. But the exodus has not stopped nor have all the refugees found permanent homes. In August 1980, there were 230,000 Indochinese waiting in regional refugee camps for permanent settlement. The Office of the U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs emphasized then that "resettlement needs are virtually as pressing as they were one year ago."[21]

If none of the three basic solutions to homelessness can be arrived at, the remaining alternative for refugees is grim. For some groups, flight from war or persecution has turned into lives, even generations, of exile. The most prominent such case is of course that of the Palestinians, most of whom were displaced over 30 years ago and are still awaiting a durable solution. Nearly two million have the status of refugees. But the Palestinians are not alone. Tens of thousands of Tibetans have remained stateless in India since 1959, and many still dream of returning to an independent Tibet. Some observers fear that the ethnic Somali refugees from Ethiopia who now reside in Somalia will become another long-term community of exiles.

The bitter experience of prolonged uprootedness certainly scars those who live through it. Their suffering is an enduring reproach to the international system that has been unable—or in some cases unwilling—to devise a stable solution to the refugee problem.

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Table 2: Third-Country Resettlement of Indochinese Refugees, 1975-July 1980

Resettlement Country	Refugees Resettled
	(number)
Argentina	1,281
Australia	39,464
Austria	1,136
Belgium	3,282
Canada	60,625
Denmark	1,570
France	66,245
Hong Kong	9,368
Italy	2,486
Japan	557
Malaysia	2,142
Netherlands	3,022
New Zealand	2,825
Norway	1,931
People's Rep. of China	265,554*
Spain	508
Sweden	1,727
Switzerland	7,192
United Kingdom	10,721
West Germany	14,297
Other	1,798
Total	497,731
United States	388,802
World Total	886,533

*Includes 263,000 direct from Vietnam reported by the People's Republic of China.
Source: U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs, "Overview."

As refugees await durable solutions to their plight, their most urgent requirement is the wherewithal to meet basic physical needs: food, clothing, shelter, medicines. But this only begins to address their problems. As soon as possible the displaced people must cease to be refugees, either by voluntarily returning home, by becoming integrated into the society that first sheltered them, or by relocating to a third country. In both relief and resettlement, the international community has a crucial role to play.

Many refugees can do little for themselves. Often, they arrive in places of asylum in a weakened state: hungry, perhaps sick or wounded, traumatized by violence and the disruption of their lives and families. Few are able to take many of their possessions with them when they flee, and only a small minority have access to even modest financial resources.

It is surprising, in view of their desperate circumstances, how many refugees do manage to fend for themselves. Only about half the 1.5 million refugees in Somalia, for example, are living in the officially established camps. The rest have taken shelter with relatives on the Somalian side of the border, or are trying to scratch out a living with their remaining animals on sparse grazing lands. Similarly, in Pakistan some of the more than 1.3 million refugees from Afghanistan have melted into the local populace, with whom they have linguistic and ethnic ties.[22]

Whether refugees support themselves or depend on relief supplies, the impact of a large number of them on the country they first reach is devastating. In poor countries, the price of basic necessities such as foodstuffs, building materials, and cooking utensils may suddenly escalate with the new demands, creating serious financial problems for the people of that area. Local labor markets, too, may be disrupted as refugees, desperate for work, drive down the prevailing wage rates. There have been reports from Pakistan, for example, of ref-

ugees agreeing to work for below-subsistence wages—able to do so, unlike the local populace, because their families were being provided with basic necessities in the camps.[23] Even in a country as affluent as the United States, the unexpected arrival of approximately 130,000 Cuban asylum-seekers in 1980 created fears of economic disruption in the Florida communities most affected. As usual, the disadvantaged among indigenous residents felt most threatened by competition from refugees.

The coordinated response of governments to the needs of both refugees and the countries that shelter them has been built around the concept of "international solidarity"—an obligation to ensure that countries that give asylum do not pay an unbearable price in terms of their own stability and development. Without such assurance, some countries undoubtedly would refuse to allow refugees to claim even temporary asylum, as has happened in Thailand, Malaysia, and, reportedly, Honduras. In all three cases, people trying to enter the country as refugees have been pushed back into the midst of the perils from which they were trying to flee.[24]

The first element of international solidarity in the context of the refugee issue is material support—money, supplies, personnel, and transportation equipment—to set up refugee camps and keep them running. This can be provided only at the invitation of the host government. Sometimes such invitations are not forthcoming, either because the host government does not wish to become embroiled in an international dispute, or because it does not want to relinquish to outsiders any degree of control over the crisis. The government of Somalia initially insisted that it would assume the full burden of caring for refugees from Ethiopia out of its own resources.[25] The number of refugees quickly mushroomed beyond its capacity, however, and the Somalis were compelled to ask for international assistance in late 1979.

The community of nations has, in general, come through with enough money and supplies to prevent wholesale starvation and epidemic disease from becoming entrenched among refugees, at least

22 once people are gathered into camps. The earliest stages of a refugee crisis are the most difficult, before money has been set aside, supplies located, administrators recruited, and logistics arranged. There are three major channels through which refugee aid moves. One is the international route, including the United Nations and its various agencies as well as the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration, a Geneva-based association of 31 governments that is not part of the U.N. system.

Within the United Nations, the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees is the agency with chief responsibility for humanitarian and legal assistance to refugees. It was established by the U.N. General Assembly in 1951, the ninth in a series of international agencies set up since World War I to deal with refugee problems. Its statute decrees that "the work of the High Commissioner shall be of an entirely non-political character; it shall be humanitarian and social and shall relate, as a rule, to groups and categories of refugees."[26] UNHCR coordinates the work of other U.N. agencies, such as UNICEF and the World Food Programme, when they work with refugees. A separate body, the U.N. Relief and Works Agency, has specific responsibility for Palestinian refugees.

A second channel for refugee assistance is bilateral aid, operating independently of the intergovernmental agencies. Most governmental aid does move through the multilateral organizations. Some governments, however, prefer to deal directly with a recipient government. The Soviet Union, for example, is not active in international refugee activities in general, but does channel some aid directly to countries with which it has close relations, such as Kampuchea and Ethiopia.

The third major route for international response is through the activities of private, voluntary organizations. In cooperation with U.N. agencies and national governments, they have taken on a large share of the responsibility for refugee relief and resettlement. The church groups, charitable organizations, citizens' committees, corporations, and private development agencies operate free of some of the political constraints that hamper or delay governmental action.

"The financial resources of private agencies are modest in relation to government funds, *but their contributions* cannot be measured in dollars."

In 1980, for example, the French volunteer agency Medicine Without Frontiers was helping refugees from El Salvador along the Honduran border before the governments of either country were ready to admit the existence of a refugee problem. Similarly, the British relief-and-development agency Oxfam delivered food to Cambodia in 1979 while governments and U.N. organizations were still arguing about whether certain channels of distribution might imply an official recognition of the Vietnamese-installed regime in Phnom Penh.[27]

The flexibility, promptness, and neutrality of many private organizations—ranging from giants like the International Red Cross to small, ad hoc groups of concerned citizens—have allowed them to fill critical gaps during emergency situations. The logistical and operational expertise built up by such agencies over years of refugee-relief work surpasses that of many governmental bodies. The financial resources of private agencies are modest in relation to government funds, but their contributions cannot be measured in dollars. Often they take up where government aid leaves off: helping refugees to build new lives in strange countries and providing the intangibles like moral support, orientation in a new community, practical advice, and friends.

The humanitarian responsibility for displaced people has not been evenly shared. Among the rich countries, the United States, West European nations, Canada, Australia, and Japan have been the major supporters of refugee relief. Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and the oil-producing countries (with the exception of Saudi Arabia) have contributed modestly, if at all. The ten countries that were the top contributors to the five major international refugee-aid agencies were responsible for 83 percent of the budget of those organizations. (See Table 3.) Moreover, these are largely the same countries whose private organizations and bilateral government programs are most generous in refugee relief.[28]

The scale of humanitarian assistance needed is greatest in Africa, both because of the number of refugees there and because of the poverty of the countries where they are seeking sanctuary. The con-

Table 3: Contributions to Five International Refugee Aid Agencies, 1979*

Country	Contribution	Contribution Per Capita
	(million dollars)	(dollars)
Sweden	28.6	3.44
Norway	11.2	2.73
Denmark	13.3	2.61
Switzerland	10.5	1.66
Netherlands	22.7	1.60
West Germany	62.8	1.02
United States	165.8	.74
United Kingdom	38.8	.69
Saudi Arabia	5.6	.68
Japan	75.9	.64

*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Relief and Works Agency, United Nations World Food Programme (for refugees), UNICEF (for refugees), and Intergovernmental Committee for Migration. Contributions by European Economic Community, totaling $66 million, have been assigned to countries in proportion to members' budget support.
Source: U.S. Committee for Refugees, "Who Helps the World's Refugees?"

tinent is home to nearly six million refugees, half outside their home countries and half internally displaced. Supporting them until they can return home to be resettled requires a continuous outpouring of resources, one that the first-asylum countries are unable to provide. With foreign donors bound to a series of special appropriations to meet their extraordinary needs, the refugees' situation is precarious. One U.S. legislator has already noted the danger of "compassion fatigue" among the citizens of affluent countries.[29]

President Nyerere of Tanzania has emphasized the need for an additional dimension to humanitarian assistance: "Although virtually all refugees initially expect to return home at some time, there will very often be large numbers of people who will be unable to return

home safely for months or years to come. It is impossible to deal with these refugees as if all that is required is temporary relief from distress. They must as quickly as possible be given a means of producing or earning their own livelihood."[30] In some instances, in camps in Somalia and Thailand, for example, steps have been taken to reach that goal of self-support.

For virtually all countries that host refugees, the fondest hope is that they will willingly return home. Without some logistical support, the return journey can be a daunting prospect even for a refugee who is eager to make it. The international agencies, particularly UNHCR, have considerable experience in repatriation operations. In addition to the huge Bengali operation in 1972, UNHCR has overseen the voluntary return of refugees to Southern Sudan in 1972-73; to Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Angola in 1975; to Burma in 1978-79; and most recently, in 1980, to Zimbabwe and Nicaragua.[31]

For all too many refugees, months and years of waiting to go home slowly turn into recognition that repatriation is not a realistic alternative; some refugees know this from the moment they take flight. They must find then a country willing to offer them a permanent home. While the international community has responded adequately, though sometimes tardily, to the need for humanitarian assistance, it has been less generous with offers of third-country resettlement. There are a handful of notable exceptions to this generalization: Canada, Australia, the United States, and France. (See Table 4.)

Between 1975 and mid-1980, nearly 900,000 refugees from Indochina were resettled in other countries, most after having spent time in refugee camps in Southeast Asia. By August 1980, some 388,000 of them had been admitted to the United States. With President Carter's commitment to admit an additional 14,000 per month for as long as the need persisted, the total number of Indochinese refugees in the US probably reached 450,000 by the year's end. In this extraordinary resettlement operation, the voluntary agencies took on most of the enormous task of matching each refugee individual or family

Table 4: Refugees Resettled in Receiving Countries, 1975-80*

Country	Refugees Resettled	Proportion of Refugees to Population
	(number)	(ratio)
Canada	74,000	1:324
Australia	44,000	1:332
United States	595,200	1:374
France	68,700	1:780
Switzerland	5,300	1:1,189
Sweden	6,100	1:1,361
Norway	2,300	1:1,783
Austria	3,700	1:2,027
West Germany	28,300	1:2,159
United Kingdom	23,800	1:2,345

*Totals taken from reports by UNHCR and the U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs. The majority of the refugees were from Indochina; others came from the Soviet Union, Cuba, and other Latin American countries.
Source: U.S. Committee for Refugees, "Who Helps the World's Refugees?"

with a sponsor willing to aid in the adjustment to a new home. Federal government funding supported the private organizations' refugee programs, but the groups themselves did the work. In the 15 months from October 1978 through December 1979, the 11 major private organizations involved in refugee resettlement assisted nearly 120,000 Indochinese refugees.[32] (See Table 5.)

Along with 388,000 Indochinese refugees resettled in the United States by August 1980, about 232,000 were admitted by other non-communist countries and more than 265,000 fled overland to China. At that time, another 390,000 remained in temporary asylum in Southeast Asia, but during the last half of 1980 the number of people leaving the camps was consistently greater than the number entering them.[33]

Table 5: Indochinese Refugees Resettled by 11 U.S. Private Voluntary Agencies, October 1, 1978-January 1, 1980

Agency	People Resettled
	(number)
American Council for Nationalities Service	16,769
American Fund for Czechoslovak Refugees	2,897
Church World Service	14,708
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society	4,322
International Rescue Committee	11,524
Iowa Refugee Service Center	956
Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Service	11,199
Tolstoy Foundation	1,998
United States Catholic Conference	49,730
World Relief Refugee Services	4,811
Young Men's Christian Association	244
Total	119,158

Source: U.S. Committee for Refugees, *1980 World Refugee Survey.*

Unlike the Indochinese, most other refugees are not seeking resettlement in a third country. The Afghans in Pakistan, the Ethiopian Somalis in Somalia, and the Palestinians in the Middle East are all awaiting political solutions that will allow them to return permanently to the lands they call home. The obligation and response of the international community thus must go beyond relief and resettlement efforts toward attempts to bring about lasting resolutions. The negotiated settlement in Zimbabwe, in which several nations—most notably Britain—played parts, is proof that such a role is possible. In the aftermath of the settlement, 250,000 refugees who had fled to Botswana, Mozambique, and Zambia were able to return home, and 800,000 internally displaced people were resettled.[34]

Few countries are truly immune to international pressure. Vietnam, for example, was persuaded to accept a program of "orderly depar-

tures" of refugees after a 65-nation conference convened in Geneva in July 1979 to address the issues raised by the "boat people."[35] Even countries that ignore diplomatic or economic pressures exerted by other governments cannot dismiss the possibility that they may be overcome by force if their actions become intolerable. There were only muted outcries against India's intervention in East Pakistan, which allowed ten million Bengali refugees to return home, or against Tanzania's intervention in Uganda, which put an end to Idi Amin's reign of terror. Thousands of Ugandans had been forced to flee into neighboring states during the Amin years. Even the installation by Vietnam of the Heng Samrin regime in Kampuchea has not been as vigorously opposed as it might have been. Though most countries of the region and elsewhere abhor Vietnamese expansionism, the brutal excesses of Heng Samrin's predecessors against their own people left the international community without a clear alternative in Kampuchea.

The grimmest prospects for refugees exist when the international community is divided in its objectives and cannot agree, for example, on who the authentic representatives of popular will in a country are or on what legitimacy a claim to self-determination has. The sources of division in opinion are often based on selfish interests, as one country or another decides that a particular faction in a dispute will serve its own objectives. In such an atmosphere, the prospects for peaceful and stable solutions to refugee-producing conflicts are dim indeed.

Long-Term Prospects

No one who has been following refugee issues in recent years is very optimistic. The underlying forces that contribute to the formation of refugee crises are, if anything, gathering strength. Population growth continues, though at a slower pace than in the past, and it has greatest momentum in those parts of the world where poverty is already endemic. The stakes in the worldwide competiton for land

"The underlying forces
that contribute to refugee crises
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and resources continue to escalate. Unequal distribution of wealth within countries is a source of increasing friction. Mechanisms to resolve disputes over international boundaries, to act upon legitimate claims for self-determination, and to react to international aggression are still too weak to keep the peace.

Nonetheless, the evolution of an international consensus on the acceptable norms of behavior for nation-states is evident. The process moves with excruciating slowness, and yet real changes are apparent over time. For example, although many kinds of imperialism persist in the world at the moment, the old system of Western colonial domination has definitely seen its day. There are still at least three refugee-producing wars going on today that are part of the last stages of the dissolution of that system: South African troops are fighting in Namibia to prevent the U.N.-decreed independence of that territory from becoming reality; Indonesia is still fighting to enforce control over the former Portuguese colony of East Timor; and Morocco is engaged in combat with the Polisario independence movement in the former Spanish colony of Western Sahara. These three may be among the final conflicts attending the demise of the old colonial system—a demise that is an almost universally acknowledged goal of the community of nations.[36]

The general concept of a nation-state is also changing, and this could have an important bearing on the future development of refugee crises. Many such crises today—those involving refugees from Chad, Ethiopia, and Vietnam, to name but three—contain elements of ethnic rivalry. The idea of a nation as a mystical association of ethnic and linguistic purity is an antique, much tarnished by its association with fascism, but it still has enormous power. What is needed is a more modern concept of the nation as an association for the mutual benefit of various people, dedicated to more abstract principles than race or language.

Many emerging states are struggling to subsume ethnic loyalties to a larger, national identity. Zimbabwe, for one, has adopted the goal of not only a multiracial society, but a nonracial society. Several

older, established countries are still trying to reach such a balance of ethnic and racial groups, troubled by demands for independent nationhood from among such groups as the Basques in Spain or the French Canadians.

There is a real and troublesome tension between a people's right of self-determination and the integrity of established states. This tension is a potent force for the creation of refugees from multiethnic countries. International law gives status to both sides of the argument. Each case of conflict between the two principles must be a judgment call; there are no answers suitable for all occasions. There is, however, a general bias toward the integrity of existing borders, for the obvious reason that most nations have an interest in maintaining the status quo.

In Africa, where the most difficult questions of self-determination exist, the consensus view is that the old boundaries must be respected even if they were carelessly drawn by departing colonial powers. Respecting these borders is seen by most African states as the only alternative to a free-for-all redrawing of the map in which no country could be sure of winning.[37] No international mechanism currently exists to oversee an orderly rearrangement. Clinging to the status quo —though it may frustrate the immediate aspirations of peoples such as the Baluchis, who straddle the borders of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, or the Kurds living in Iran and Iraq—may be the only way to avoid bloody struggles guaranteed to boost the world total of refugees. The best resolution the international community may be able to devise is to combine a respect for existing boundaries with steady pressure to enhance the internal autonomy of subgroups within countries.

If the governments of existing countries are to receive international support for the status quo, however, they perforce take on a solemn responsibility to act in the interests of the whole nation. A new consensus among nations must be made explicit: that a government has an obligation to protect the interests of all its citizens. If not, it sacrifices its claim to sovereignty over them. National leaders who

use their power to advance the interests of one tribe, linguistic group, region, or class at the expense of others cannot expect unqualified support from the international community if an oppressed group rejects the authority of those leaders.

Acting on such a principle will inevitably bring charges of interference in the internal affairs of countries whose leaders choose to abuse their own people. It is essential, therefore, that action against the abuses be taken collectively, with the full weight of the international community behind it. Any course of action within a country that causes its people to become refugees is automatically a matter of international concern. West Germany has put before the United Nations a proposal that would make this understanding explicit. If adopted, it would establish an international code of conduct that would hold governments accountable for actions that lead to the mass exodus of their own people.[38]

Any international agreement would have to rest on the articulation of certain unmistakable norms. It is not acceptable to starve a whole population in order to weaken the fighters among them. It is not legitimate to expel an ethnic group thought by the dominant group to be "unassimilable." It is certainly not acceptable for any government to depopulate part of its own territory in order to control it. Such actions can no longer be tolerated as exercises in national sovereignty. They do, in fact, infringe on the sovereignty of other countries, in general by destabilizing the international system and specifically by flooding other countries with refugees.

These are the large issues that will take years, or even decades, to resolve. What can be done in the meantime to ensure that existing refugees are taken care of? The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees continues to work steadily to extend and clarify the concepts of asylum, refugee status, non-refoulement (not returning refugees involuntarily to the countries from which they have fled), and the like. There is currently no international legal instrument that requires countries to give asylum to refugees at least on a temporary basis.

32 Establishing that fundamental right of asylum is identified by the UNHCR as one of its highest priorities for the eighties."

Another target for the coming decade should be to ensure that neutral relief operations have guaranteed access to refugees in dire need of humanitarian assistance. It is important to internationalize such operations. If one country or group of nations assumes the lion's share of responsibility for relief, the operations inevitably assume a political cast and their neutrality becomes suspect.

At the Geneva meeting held in 1979 to discuss Indochinese refugees, the Japanese delegate declared that "the problem of refugees is no longer a matter of simple humanitarian concern, but has become a serious political problem affecting the peace and stability of the region."[40] The same could be said for any of the large-scale refugee crises that afflict the world community today. No country is beyond the reach of such threats to peace, and therefore no country can justifiably remain aloof from the two most pressing needs of refugees: immediate humanitarian assistance and support for a long-term resolution of their plight. The capacity to respond constructively on both these fronts must expand at least as quickly as does the potential for new refugee crises. There are few more compelling arguments for international cooperation.

Notes

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